

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANJUL 00384 211149Z

ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

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FM AMEMBASSY BANJUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4160

INFO AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY BISSAU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANJUL 0384

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT GA

SUBJECT: GAMBIAN ELECTION SHAPING UP

REF A BANJUL 273, B BANJUL 368

1. AS GAMBIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN ENTERS FINAL TWO WEEKS, BOTH PPP AND COMBINED OPPOSITION ARE PREDICTING VICTORY. HOWEVER, MOST OBSERVERS FEEL PPP SHOULD RETAIN COMFORTABLE MARGIN IN NEW PARLIAMENT, WHICH THUS ASSURES RE-ELECTION PRESIDENT SIR DAUDA JAWARA. AS EVIDENCE HIS CONFIDENCE, SIR DAUDA LEFT BANJUL MARCH 16 FOR THREE-DAY VISIT TO ACCRA WHERE HE WILL ATTEND GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATION OF HIS ALMA MATER, ACHIMOTA COLLEGE.

2. PRESIDENT HAS JUST RETURNED FROM ARDUOUS 11ADAY CAMPAIGN TRIP TO GAMBIA'S TWO EASTERN-MOST DIVISIONS MID ANDURD. CHARGE SAW HIM BRIEFLY AT GEORGETOWN, MARCH 10, WHERE SIR DAUDA MADE KEYNOTE SPEECH AT 50TH ANNIVERSARY LOCAL HIGHT
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PAGE 02 BANJUL 00384 211149Z

SCHOOL. PRESIDENT WAS SHOWING NO FATIGUE, SEEMED IN FINE SPIRITS, AND HIS ENTORUAGE SAID THEIR RECEPTION THROUGHOUT TOUR HAD BEEN EXCELLENT. WITH POSSIBLE EXCEPTION ONE SEAT IN URD (WHERE RACE IS COMPLICATED BY PERSONALITIES AND INTER-FAMILY SQUABBLES), IT LOOKS AS IF PPP WILL CAPTURE ALL 12 SEATS IN UPPER TWO DIVISIONS.

3. PLITICS IN NBD IS COMPLICATED BY FACT THAT THIS IS NCP LEADER SHERIFF DIBBA'S HOME TERRITORY. DR. LAMIN SAHO, WHO IS RUNNING ON PPP TICKET AGAINST DIBBA IN HIS CENTRAL BADIBU CONSTITUENCY, IS CONFIDENT OF VICTORY. IN TWO OR THREE NORTH BANK CONSTITUENCIES WHERE NCP MIGHT HAVE A CHANGE, DIBBA HAS SUPPOSEDLY CHOSEN LESS THAN BEST CANDIDATE. NCP WOULD DO WELL TO TAKE TWO NBD'S SEVEN SEATS, AND COULD CONCEIVABLY NOT TAKE ANY.

4. LRD'S FOUR SEATS APPEAR TO BE SAFE FOR PPP. PRESIDENT JAWARA WILL RESUME CAPAIGNING HERE AND IN NBD FOLLOWING HIS RETURN FROM ACCRA.

5. NCP POPULARITY IS PERHPAS HIGHEST IN WESTERN DIVISION, WHICH HAS 9 SEATS IN PARLIAMENT. PPP CAN ONLY FEEL RESONABLY SAFE IN FOUR FO THESE CONSTITUENCIES, FACING STRONG OPPOSITION IN CENTRAL KOMBO, EASTERN KOMBO AND BANJUL SUBURBS OF SERREKUNDA (2 SEATS) AND BAKAU. NONETHELESS, PPP IS FIGHTING HARD FOR ALL SEATS AND CONCEDES NOTHING TO NCP.

6. IN BANJUL ITSELF (3 SEATS), TRADITIONAL OPPOSITION UP APPEARS TO HAVE SAFE HOLD ON TWO SEATS IT NOW OCCUPIES. PPP HAS NEVER BEEN STRONG IN BANJUL, AND WILL DO WELL TO RETAIN ITS ONLY CITY SEAT, THAT OF POWERFUL FINANCE MINISTER GARBA-JAHUMPA.

7. PPP CONTINUES TO BENEFIT FROM FRACTURED OPPOSITION. ALTHOUGH SMALL, NLP HAS FORMED ELECTORAL ALLIANCE WITH UP, NEITHER APPEARS READY TO COOPERATE WITH LARGEST OPPOSITION

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANJUL 00384 211149Z

GROUP, NCP. IN AT LEAST ONE CONSTITUENCY (SABACH SANJAL, NBD), NCP AND NLP/UP ALLIANCE WILL EACH FIELD CANDIDATE IN FOUR-WAY RACE WHICH INCLUDES AVOWEDLY COMMUNIST INDEPENDENT. PPP INCUMBENT, WHO ADMITTED TO CHARGE HE WOULD HAVE BEEN IN SERIOUS TROUBLE AGAINST UNITED OPPOSTION, NOW APPEARS TO BE COMFORTABLY AHEAD.

8. WITH TWO WEEKS REMAINING IN CAMPAIGN, IT APPEARS THAT OPPOSITION COULD CAPTURE AT MOST 10-12 SEATS IN 35- SEAT PARLIAMENT (TWO OR THREE SEATS FRO UP, REMAINDER NCP). PPP MIGHT BE ABLE HOLD OPPOSITION TO AS FEW AS FIVE OR SIX SEATS, WHICH WOULD GIVE IT PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY EQUIVALENT TO WHAT IT NOW HOLDS, AND WOULD BE INTERPRETED AS SOLID VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN CONTINUED PPP RULE. SHOULD OPPOSITION GAIN 10 SEATS OR MORE, THIS WOULD BE VIEWED AS MAJOR POPULAR CHALLENGE TO PPP AND ITS CONDUCT OF GOVERNMENT. WHILE PRESIDENT JAWARA WOULD RETAIN CONFORTABLE WORKING MAJORITY, PRESTIGE OF HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD BE DIMMED AND OPPOSITION MP'S WOULD PROVE FEISTY IN NEW PARLIAMENT. SUCH RESULT MIGHT

INDUCE PRESIENT TO INSTITUTE SWEEPING CABINET AND OTHER
GOVERNMENTAL CHANGES WHICH MANY THOUGHTFUL GAMBIANS FEEL
ARE LONG OVERDUE; BUT THIS IS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN.

9. GAMBIAN ELECTION IS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST BECAUSE IT
CONTINUES DEMOCRATIC TRADITION WHICH IS ALMOST UNIQUE IN
PRESENT-DAY AFRICA. RESULTS OF APRIL 4-5 ELERCISE ARE
CLEARLY NOT KNOWN, AND MAJOR UPSET COULD OCCUR. ONLY
CRITICISM WHICH COULD BE JUSTIFIABLY VOICED CONCERNING
CAMPAIGN THUS FAR IS VIRTUALLY COMPLETE MONOPOLY EXERCISED
BY PRESENT AND PPP OVER GOVERNMENT-OPERATED RADIO
GAMBIA. SENSITIVE TO THIS ASPECT, CHARGE WAS TOLD BY SEC GEN
GOTG THAT PRESIDENT PLANS MAKE RADIO TIME AVAILABLE FOR NCP
AND UP/NLP AS ELECTION APPROACHES. TOTAL OF 10 HOURS FOR
STRAIGHT POLITICAL BROADCASTING ARE TO BE ALLOTTED AS FOLLOWS:
PPP 5 HOURS; NCP 3 HOURS; AND UP/NLP 2 HOURS. BROADCASTS
ARE SUPPOSED TO CONCETRATE ON ISSUES AND AVOID PERSONALITIES,
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PAGE 04 BANJUL 00384 211149Z

BUT THIS IS NOT IN NATURE GAMBIAN POLITICS. TENOR OF
CAMPAIGN THUS FAR HAS ALMOST AVOIDED ISSUES.
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